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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of 50 school districts in the seven state region (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin) to determine the types of support available to parents of children with disabilities and their satisfaction with these supports. Responses of 3,558 parents and guardians (11.9% of total sample) in 41 school districts resulted in findings such as: 50% of parents reported their child had a learning disability; 48% of parents felt well informed about how to work with their schools; 52% did not receive any form of parent training; 20% indicated they received parent training provided by schools; parents desired more written materials (45%), more meetings with teachers (37%), and more parent training (33%); 22% requested no help; and most (64%) elementary and middle/junior high parents met with school personnel once each semester. A detailed analysis of 10 specific survey items by most frequently occurring grade levels and disability groups revealed strikingly similar responses by parents with children in elementary and middle/junior high schools, and parents of children with learning disabilities, speech and language disorders, and behavior disorder/emotional disturbance. Results suggest schools should offer more parent training and encourage the parent/school partnership. Tables detail survey results. (DB)

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY
REPORT FOR THE SEVEN STATE REGION

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NCREL gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the staff in distributing the surveys and the parents who completed the surveys from the 41 school districts that participated in the study. Participating school districts were:

Illinois
Cahokia
Deer Creek
Granite City
Rockford
St. Charles
Valley View

Indiana
Lake Station
Franklin City
South Henry
MSD Washington

Iowa
Boone City
Fort Madison
Iowa City

Michigan
Big Rapids
Lakewood
Lansing
L.Anse Creuse
Saranac
Taylor
Traverse City

Minnesota
Cannon Falls
Hutchinson
Osseo
Richfield
Sleepy Eye
South Washington

Ohio
Springfield
Toledo
Urbana City
Wapakoneta
Mentor
Tipp City
West Clermont
Hillard
West Branch
Hopewell
Eastwood

Wisconsin
Madison
Markeson
Muskego
River Falls

PARENT INVOLVEMENT SURVEY
REPORT FOR THE SEVEN STATE REGION

A study of 50 school districts in the seven state region served by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL) was conducted in an effort to determine the types of support available to parents of children with disabilities receiving special education services, and their satisfaction with those supports. This study was a joint effort of the National Parent CHAIN and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. The study was conducted as a survey sent home to parents by the schools serving their children. This report is a summary of the survey results.

Method

The Parent Involvement Survey was developed by NCREL and reviewed by representatives of the National Parent CHAIN, each of the seven state education agencies and a small sample of parents. Items typically called for a frequency or ranking response which is ordinal data. According to the Fry Procedure, readability level of the survey ranged between seventh and eighth grade. School districts in the seven state region were sampled proportionately by student population. The number of school districts drawn from each state were as follows:

Iowa	3
Illinois	8
Indiana	6
Michigan	11
Minnesota	5
Ohio	12
Wisconsin	5

Districts ranged in size from enrollments greater than 7,500 to less than 1,200. Data for each district were obtained through the Common Core of Data (1987-88) from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Distribution of the surveys was begun with a letter sent to each chief state school officer requesting support for the study. All seven agreed to participate, and an introductory letter was sent to superintendents of the randomly selected school districts in each state. Surveys were sent to each of the superintendents who delivered them to schools serving children with disabilities within their districts. Principals of the schools distributed the surveys to special education teachers who sent them home to parents via their students. Parents were instructed to fill out the survey and return it to the school or mail it to Dr. Raymond Lows, the data tabulator.

Results

Parents and guardians from 41 school districts in the seven state region responded to the questionnaire. A total of 284,456 students attended the 41 school districts. Of those, 81 percent were white and 19 percent were minorities. African-American children accounted for two-thirds of minority students in the sample. A total of 3558 parents/guardians responded to the survey. The regional cumulative return rate for the questionnaire was only 11.90 percent. Return rates for each state were as follows: Illinois (17.3%), Indiana (5%), Iowa (10.7%), Michigan (7%), Minnesota (20.6%), Ohio (11.2%), and Wisconsin (13.5%). Results are reported in median percentages based upon ordinal type data. Summary tables accompany this report and present results across all seven states and the region.

Full-time employment among responders ranged from moderately high for fathers (89%), and low for guardians (51%) and mothers (44%). The highest percentage of responders reported their child to have a learning disability was the primary disability (50%), followed by speech and

language disorders (18%), behavior disorder/emotionally disturbed (11%), and unspecified other (11%). A sum of over 100 percent is probably due to parents selecting multiple disabilities even though they were instructed to check only the primary disability. Please see Table 1 for a complete summary of disability percentages by state and the region. A large majority of responders (91%) were not members of any organized parent group, and most of them were parents or guardians of children receiving special services in elementary schools.

Only 48 percent of parents surveyed felt well informed about how to work with their schools to support their children. However, most responders felt comfortable in working with school personnel (90%). In addition, 95 percent of those responding felt they understood what school staff were telling them about their sons and daughters, and 86 percent felt that the people at the school valued their point of view. Nevertheless, while most parents (82%) felt involved in their child's educational program, many (76%) wished to have even more involvement. Only three percent of responders met on a weekly basis with school personnel to discuss the educational programs of their children; three percent met twice per month; 11 percent met once per month, 63 percent met each semester, and 20 percent met only once per year. Regarding parents' satisfaction with those meetings: 57 percent were very satisfied, 39 percent were somewhat satisfied, and four percent were not satisfied. Responses indicated that 27 percent of parents were involved in their child's staffings. This ranged from a high of 68 percent in Iowa to a low of nine percent in Ohio. See Table 2 for a state and regional comparison.

A majority of responders (52%) did not receive parent training in any form, subsequently 50 percent perceived no benefits (see Tables 3 and 4). Only 20 percent of parents indicated they received training provided by schools or school districts in each state. Of those who received training, 16 percent were trained for less than three hours. Parents who have learned to support their child's special education needs primarily worked with teachers (87%), 65 percent read available materials, 59 percent have learned to work it out in the family, and 49 percent have worked with related service specialists. These percentages tally well above 100 percent because many responders cited multiple sources. A complete summary can be found in Table 5. Finally, when surveyed as to the kinds of help they would like, parents cited more written materials (45%), more meetings with teachers (37%), and more parent training (33%). Interestingly, 22 percent requested no help at this time. These items are summarized in Table 6.

A separate analysis was performed on 10 survey items by grade level and primary disability. These items queried information levels, group membership, amount and satisfaction of working with school personnel, preferred help, and parent training. Due to the low rate of return, the analysis was limited to those grade levels and disabilities producing the highest frequency, and thus, the most useful information. Across all 10 items, typically 75 percent or more of responders were parents or guardians of children served in elementary or middle/junior high school (M/JH) settings. As reported earlier, the majority of responders indicated their children had learning disabilities (LD), speech and language disorders (SP/LNG), and behavior disorder/emotional disturbance (BD/ED). Responses from these grade levels and disabilities are reported here within their respective groups and not for the total number of responders, which accounts for the higher percentage figures.

Responses by grade level indicated that 48.6 percent of elementary and 43 percent of M/JH parents felt well informed about how to work with the school to support their children. An almost equal percentage felt somewhat informed (42.4% and 45.5%). Similar results were found across disability groups with LD (43.4%; 45%), SP/LNG (50.8%; 41.7%), and BD/ED (44.4%; 43.9%) indicating "well informed," and "somewhat informed," respectively. Regarding membership in a general parent group, 89.6 percent of elementary school parents and 91.2 percent of M/JH parents reported not belonging to any such group. These figures were echoed by disability groups as well (LD, 91.9%; SP/LNG, 96.1%; BD/ED, 93.5%). In terms of membership in a "disability-specific" parent group, 93 percent of elementary school responders answered "no", and 93.7 percent of m/jh responders also answered "no". A majority of LD (95.7%), SP/LNG (96.1%) and BD/ED (93.5%) group responders answered "no" to this same

question. As far as comfort in working with school personnel was concerned, 90.2 percent of elementary school parents and 88.2 percent of M/JH parents responded positively. Again, these figures were similar to those collected for the LD (88.2%), SP/LNG (92.4%) and BD/ED (86%) groups.

Parents and guardians were asked how often they met with school personnel, and their satisfaction with the information obtained from their schools regarding their children. Elementary school and M/JH parents met with school personnel most often by semester (64% and 63%), as did LD, SP/LNG and BD/ED group parents (63.3%, 63.5% and 57%). The majority in all groups felt either satisfied with information given by their schools (54.4%, elementary; 46.5%, M/JH; 49.6%, LD; 56%, SP/LNG; 49%, BD/ED) or somewhat satisfied (39.4%, elementary; 43.2%, M/JH; 41.6%, LD; 38.4% SP/LNG; 40.4%, BD/ED). When responding to how much help they received in learning how to support their child's schooling, responders with children in elementary and M/JH schools indicated: a great deal of help (37.3%; 29.8%), some help (53.2%; 57.5%), and no help (9.5%; 12.8%). Parallel responses were given by LD, SP/LNG and BD/ED group responders: a great deal of help (32%; 36.7%; 34.2%), some help (56%; 54.9%; 52.2%), and no help (12%; 8.5%; 13.7%).

Responders were asked to indicate the kinds of help they would like from their schools and school districts. These items included such options as more meetings with teachers, more written materials, more parent training, and none at this time. Across all options, responses from elementary school parents ranged from 59.3 percent to 54.6 percent, and from 24 percent to 19.7 percent for M/JH parents. Responses from disability group responders were inconclusive since the analysis did not allow for comparison across disability frequencies.

Finally, six items were given which related to parent training. Responders were first asked to select from five items which best described their involvement in parent training. The majority of elementary school parents (57.8%) responded that children and duties at home made it extremely difficult to gain information about and become involved in parent training, while the majority of M/JH parents (23.9%) indicated they had initiated activities to organize a parent training program. No analysis across disability groups was available for these items. In terms of parent training received during the past year, elementary and M/JH school parents most frequently responded "none" (67.7% and 73.5%) or "less than three hours" (16.9% and 14.4%). Likewise, LD, SP/LNG and BD/ED group parents indicated "none" (72.1%, 66.9% and 59.3%) or "less than three hours" (15%, 19.7% and 14.8%). Table 7 summarizes response percentages across grade levels and disability groups for eight of the 10 questions.

Conclusions

These results should be taken with some caution since just less than 12 percent of regional parents with disabled children responded to the survey, and of those, 50 percent were parents of children with learning disabilities. This would appear to bias the results in terms of this subgroup of parents and their experiences and perceptions. However, a detailed analysis of 10 specific survey items by most frequently occurring grade levels and disability groups revealed strikingly similar responses by parents with children in elementary and middle/junior high schools, and parents of children with learning disabilities, speech and language disorders, and behavior disorder/emotionally disturbed. Specific limitations to the study were the procedures for distributing and returning surveys. There was apparently confusion in some school districts regarding the responsibility of distributing surveys to as many parents as possible. Thus, the sample was more restricted than originally planned. Another problem was in the method of distribution. Sending information home to parents via their children is often risky at best, but

when used as part of a research procedure there is simply too little control. This problem is compounded by the fact that parents were responsible for returning their surveys to the schools, probably by their children or by mailing them to Dr. Lows if they wanted to provide a first class stamp. These procedures may have been necessary due to a limited budget. However, the time and effort to perform the study has been diminished because of the poor return rate across almost all school districts, all seven states, and the region.

Nevertheless, some helpful information may be gleaned from this study. Since a clear majority of responding parents feel comfortable working with personnel in the regional school districts and consider their points of view valued, districts should make an effort to provide more education for parents in a variety of ways. With 76 percent of parents desiring to have more involvement in their child's education, organized parent training would benefit from a developmental partnership where parents and school districts in each state determine what written materials would be available and how they would be disseminated. Direct training should be considered an on-going commitment by state education agencies, school districts and parents. Together they might develop a series of training sessions on prioritized issues or practices at various sites, e.g., district buildings, local school buildings, and even parents' homes (depending on the issue or practice being covered). State education agencies and local school districts should make a dedicated effort to promoting well informed, highly satisfied parents. It may also be helpful to encourage parent organizations to become involved in the process since they are clearly underrepresented across all grade levels and disability groups. Their inclusion could help create more resources and enable them to increase their memberships.

A parent/school partnership is advantageous to both parties in that school personnel do not have the added responsibility of planning and preparing for training workshops with the fear that relatively few parents will turn out. On the other hand, to involve parents in the planning and implementation of training provides greater ownership, tends to increase interest and commitment, and provides a greater resource pool of ideas and potential trainers. Results of the survey for the seven state region suggest a foundation from which to expand parent involvement in more proactive ways.

Table 1

Primary disability of responders' children
(reported in percentages)

Disability	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
Autism	5	2	0	.7	.4	.6	.4	.7
Emotionally Disturbed	12	15	9	9	10	10	9	11
Sensory Impairments	3	6.6	5	4.2	4.3	5.4	9.2	5.2
Developmental Delay	5	11	3	5	7	7	4	7
Educable Mental Retardation	7	12	14	6	4	3	8	6
Learning Disability	53	65	61	54	49	55	46	50
Multiple handicaps	2	4	3	2	.6	3	2	2
Physical Handicap	5	6	4	6	5	2	3	4
Severe/Profound Mental Retardation	5	3	1	.9	.8	.6	.8	1
Speech and Language Impairment	8	19	6	14	21	16	27	18
Trainable Mental Retardation	2	6	5	2	1	1	6	3
Other Health Impairment	2	1	3	2	.8	.7	1	1
Other	12	10	8	14	12	12	8	11

Table 2

Percentage of parent involvement in school situations

Situations	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
Staffing	68	54	25	10	45	9	22	27
School Board Review	11	27	10	3	5	11	7	11
Mediation Process	11	13	13	10	8	6	9	8
Court Case	16	6	6	5	4	5	5	5

Table 3

Sources that provided training to parents
(reported in percentages)

Training Sources	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
School or School District	18	22	17	22	28	15	18	20
State Department of Education	6	6	4	3	2	2	3	2
Outside private agency	7	4	4	5	8	4	6	5
Other	13	9	6	6	7	7	9	8
Received no training	47	51	53	53	42	60	52	52

Table 4

Perceived benefits of training
(reported in percentages)

Benefits	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
Work better with educators	14	11	8	8	13	7	8	9
Know more about children's services	17	18	16	16	18	12	15	15
Work better with my child at home	27	28	14	24	31	20	23	24
Other	5	2	0	2	2	3	2	2
Received no training	42	45	52	51	42	57	49	50

Table 5

Sources through which parents learned to support their children's special education needs (reported in percentages)

Sources	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
Teachers	92	86	89	88	91	82	90	87
Specialists	48	49	55	47	62	41	52	49
Parents	20	24	27	22	24	18	21	21
Administrators	36	27	36	33	30	29	23	29
Agency other than the school	30	17	14	16	17	13	20	17
Any special group	9	12	13	7	8	7	8	8
Read materials	61	69	74	65	64	62	68	65
Work it out in the family	62	60	67	62	55	59	63	59
Other	9	7	11	6	7	7	9	7
Have not considered	2	1	0	3	.6	3	2	2

Table 6

Types of help requested by parents
(reported in percentages)

Types of help	IA	IL	IN	MI	MN	OH	WI	Region
Meetings with teachers	32	33	45	41	35	36	38	37
Meetings with other school personnel	14	18	22	16	17	19	20	18
Written materials	47	44	51	47	40	49	39	45
Parent training	33	33	37	30	34	33	31	33
Support from parents	16	14	12	10	13	12	14	13
Other	11	8	12	26	8	9	14	9
None at this time	23	24	17	71	27	20	21	22

Table 7

Summary of Item Analysis by Grade Level and Disability Group
(reported as within group percentages)

Item	Elementary	M/JH	LD	SP/LNG	BD/ED
Informed on how to work with your school (well/somewhat)	48.6/42.4	43/45.5	43.4/43.9	50.8/41.7	44.4/43.9
Parent group (no)	89.6	91.2	91.9	89.5	92.05
"Disability specific" parent group (no)	93	93.7	95.7	96.1	93.5
Comfortable working with school personnel (yes)	90.2	88.2	88.2	92.4	86
Frequency of meeting with school personnel (per semester)	64	63	63.3	63.5	56.9
Satisfaction with information given by schools (very satisfied/ somewhat satisfied)	54.4/39.4	46.5/43.2	49.6/41.6	56/38.4	49/40.4
Amount of help received (great deal/some/none)	37.3/53.2/9.5	29.8/57.5/12.8	32/56/12	36.7/54.9/8.5	34.2/52.2/13.7
Amount of training received (none/some)	67.7/16.9	73.5/14.4	72.1/15	66.9/19.7	59.3/14.8